

MEMORANDUM TO THE WATER POLICY TASK FORCE

February 10, 2004

TO: ***Members of the Water Policy Task Force***

FROM: ***Daniel E. Griset, Sr. Regional Planner, X895, griset@scag.ca.gov***

SUBJECT: ***Ventura County's Matilija Ecosystem Restoration Project***

RECOMMENDATION:

Recommend that the Energy and Environment Committee support state and federal funding and legislative initiatives required for the successful implementation of the Matilija Ecosystem Restoration Project.

BACKGROUND:

The Matilija Ecosystem Restoration Project is one of the most interesting environmental projects of its kind in the country. This uniqueness owes to the proposed removal of the Matilija Dam (originally constructed to a height of 198 feet), the largest dam demolition project proposed in the nation. Along with the dam removal the Project aims to restore the watershed hydrology and habitat that was critically compromised by the construction of the dam in 1947.

Two speakers who are intimately familiar with the Project will explain its features and challenges to the Task Force: Jeff Pratt, Director of Ventura County's Watershed Protection District (WPD); and Susan Hughes, a Legislative Analyst with the County.

Working in conjunction with the Bureau of Reclamation and the Army Corps of Engineers, the WPD, as owner of Matilija Dam, is the sponsor of this \$130 million project. Community and water agency support for this project has developed in recent years as public understanding of watershed issues has grown. Initially, however, the nature of the project sparked opposition from various Ventura County water agencies and flood control advocates. That opposition has diminished as the mitigation planning process has resolved concerns and fears.

General public support for the project has grown as stakeholders became increasingly aware of the nearly complete obsolescence and impairments of the Dam, a facility that was constructed originally to create storage for agricultural needs and to a lesser extent provide flood control benefits. Currently, however, the Dam reservoir has accumulated nearly 6 million cubic years of debris and sediment, reducing its water storage by more than 93% of its original designed capacity (from about 7,000 acre feet to now about 400 acre feet). With current trends the Dam's reservoir is expected to lose its entire storage capacity and any of the few

remaining flood control benefits by 2020. The drainage area behind the Dam is the Matilija Creek watershed with its 55 square miles, some 15 miles upstream from the Pacific Ocean and a tributary to the Ventura River.

The objectives of this restoration project include habitat restoration (improving aquatic and terrestrial habitat to benefit fish and wildlife species), hydrological restoration (restoring the river's hydrologic and sediment transport conditions to pre-dam conditions) and recreational amenities (returning the dam property to the US Forest Service to become an outdoor education and recreation site).

Though the County has approved the project's environmental studies and nearly \$400,000 in federal funding has been approved, the next hurdle is funding for the project's design and engineering. The budget for this key implementation phase is about \$6.5 million. The overall financial strategy for the project anticipates that local agencies will fund 35% of the project costs.

NOTE: The website for the Project can be found at <http://www.matilijadam.org/>.

Map of the Ventura River Watershed:

